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Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, a brief account of her life

Charles Brierley
Garside



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BLESSÉE MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.

A brief Account of her Life.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

A SELECTION FROM HER SAYINGS, AND THE DECREE
OF HER BEATIFICATION.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES B. GARSIDE, M.A.

AUTHOR OF 'THE PROPHET OF CARMEL,' 'DISCOURSES ON SOME
PARABLES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT,' AND 'THE
HELPERS OF THE HOLY SOULS.'

'I shall die happy now that the Heart of my Saviour
begins to be known.' B. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.



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PREFACE.

THE following account of the Life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, originally written for the *Monthly Magazine of the Holy Rosary*, has been enlarged by much additional matter.

The Author takes this opportunity of expressing how much he is indebted to the excellent *Life of Blessed Margaret Mary*, by the Rev. G. Tickell, S.J., from which source he has chiefly drawn his materials. Those who desire a full and accurate biography are referred to the above work, and also to the Life by Bishop Languet, formerly published in the valuable Oratorian Series of the Modern Saints. The latter contains several interesting letters of B. Margaret Mary to various correspondents, from which some of the Sayings of the Saint forming the fourth chapter of the present compendious account have been taken.

The chapters explanatory of such theological terms as 'Venerable,' 'Heroic Virtue,' 'Affirmation of Miracles,' and 'Beatification' have been added for the benefit of those readers who have not the means of consulting works that treat of these subjects.

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BLESSED MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.

CHAPTER I.

BLESSED MARGARET MARY'S EARLY LIFE—HER ENTRANCE INTO RELIGION.

'THE path of the just,' writes Solomon, 'as a shining light, goeth forwards, and increaseth even to perfect day' (Prov. iv. 18). This is one of those deep sayings that admit of many interpretations; as you turn it round in different directions it gives out, like the diamond, manifold streams of radiance. If it is true that during the life of a holy person the interior illumination and resplendent beauty of grace grow and unfold themselves progressively within the soul, it is also true, in another sense, that the very external world itself is irradiated by the track of the Saints. 'The light goeth forward,' and its beams impart a golden touch to even things material when they come within its range. Places that were

before comparatively insignificant rise into unforeseen importance through their association with the history of God's elect; and their names, formerly little known, float about the wide globe and throughout centuries of time, upon the mighty tide of that fame which the Saints themselves would have shrunk from contemplating, if they had foreseen it in the days of their flesh, but which the Church delights to acknowledge and to spread after their departure from the earth. What was Paray-le-Monial before the establishment in it of the Order of the Visitation? What was it until it became the scene of the marvellous supernatural career of Margaret Mary Alacoque? What has it been since that period, and what is it now? When Margaret Mary used to go about asking with her tiny infantine lips to be taught how to pray, little did she dream how glorious, through her instrumentality, would that Paray become, whose name even, until many years afterwards, she did not know.

How strange are the ways of God! Who could have foreseen that the whole world would be made to resound, and by means so unexpected, with the name of Margaret Mary Alacoque, the events connected with her life, and the various questions of religion, both theolo-

gical and devotional, which have grouped themselves around her as a natural centre? The very attacks of our Protestant journals upon the English pilgrimage to Paray* have unintentionally awakened a wide-spread curiosity amongst non-Catholics to know something about a topic which is to them so unfamiliar, and have also stimulated ignorant and careless Catholics to give greater attention of mind to so important a subject, and to increase their fervour in the practice of devotions towards the Heart of Jesus.

Truly 'the path of the just is as a shining light,' and their enemies assist not unfrequently in spreading far and wide, contrary to their real intention, the rays which they wish to extinguish by their adverse comments.

With these prefatory remarks, we now proceed to give a brief sketch of the chief incidents in the life of Blessed Margaret Mary. 'There is no study, after that of the Sacred Scriptures,' says Father Faber, 'which will yield a man more profit for his soul than an assiduous perusal of the biographies of the Saints;' and as we like to trace any great object of nature from its germinal starting-point, so it is especially interesting to watch the dawn of any remarkable character in the Kingdom

* 4th September 1873.

of Grace. Some Saints have not sprung up to any special exaltation until after many years; the future spiritual eagle has not been discerned in the nest; others seem to begin their mystic flight towards the high mountains of perfection almost from the cradle. Margaret Mary was of the latter class. She was born at Terrau, a little village in Burgundy, on the 22d July, the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, 1647. Her parents were highly respectable, her father being a judge, much esteemed for his integrity, possessing sufficient means for every ordinary comfort, and bearing a reputation for charity towards the poor. Margaret, when quite in her infancy, showed the signal influence of grace in the following manner. She had a peculiar dread of sin even before she had any definite idea of its real nature and consequences. A kind of chilling shadow seemed to pass over her soul at the bare notion of anything opposed to the will of God; without any very accurate apprehension of what was meant by the word 'God,' it would appear as if her soul shuddered, so to speak, at the imagination of contrariety to His sanctity.

If ever she was too vivacious and impulsive, as children naturally are, it was quite enough for her parents to say that God was

not pleased with her; in an instant she not only became quiet and obedient, but showed signs of deep compunction. As an example of her supernaturally instinctive yearning towards high aspirations, she took a vow of chastity when hardly four years old. This vow was made one day, at the Holy Sacrifice, during the moment of consecration; and when relating the circumstance, long after, to her confessor, Father Rolin, S.J., in obedience to his command, she says, ‘I did not understand what I had done, nor the meaning of either the word “vow” or “chastity.”’ But she acted under an internal guidance which framed for her the intention and the language. If this seems strange, it must be remembered that just as a painter begins his picture by a line here and a line there, and it is only at the conclusion that the spectator perceives on the canvas the full image of the idea which was in the artist’s mind from the beginning, so—if we may reverently use the analogy—the Holy Ghost may imprint on a soul the rudimentary lines of a particular virtue, which the soul itself does not at the time intellectually comprehend. Thus Margaret was drawn into the sacred circle of a vow of chastity when she was unable to do more than feel and correspond to a yearning, which she afterwards saw

to be the realisation of what she would have desired consciously to embrace had she been capable of then understanding the nature of the promise made by her lips.

Young as she was, she already began to feel the power of His voice Who has said to so many chosen souls, 'I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart' (*Osee ii. 14*). Although naturally merry-hearted, effusive, like most children, in her affections, and possessing an unusually quick intelligence, yet she was found to be constantly escaping from the presence and conversation of those of her own age, as well as of her elders, in order to hide herself in some solitary nook, to be with God. She was one of those doves who, when scarcely fledged, found herself, partly from the fear of being sullied by contact with creatures, and partly from love of stillness, ever watching for an opportunity to bury herself in the cleft of the rock.

Margaret Mary found greater facilities for retirement when, at four years of age, she was consigned to the care of her godmother, Madame de Fautrières. This lady lived at the Castle of Corcheval. To the intense delight of her godchild, there was a chapel in the castle, in which the Blessed Sacrament

was kept. This was the real home of Margaret; when not engaged in her tasks, she was always sure to be discovered upon her bare knees, and with uplifted hands, before our Divine Lord in the tabernacle. It was during her stay with Madame de Fautrières that she manifested a remarkable insight into the character of one of her teachers. There were two ladies who gave her religious instruction: one whose manners were rather stern; the other who was fond of humouring her fancies and petting her with endearing caresses. Contrary to the ordinary tendency of childhood, which dislikes reproof, Margaret preferred the severe mistress; and that this preference was a supernatural instinct was afterwards evident from the fact that the other lady proved to be a most pernicious character.

After remaining some time with Madame de Fautrières, Margaret returned to her mother. At eight years of age her father died, leaving her mother burdened with the charge of five sons, and with not very ample means. During the period immediately following, little Margaret seems to have been abandoned to the care of servants, picking up her education in irregular ways, and at broken intervals. When eight years and a half old, she was sent to a school at the convent of the Urbanistes,

or Sisters of St. Clare, who followed their rule as modified by Pope Urban VIII. They soon found what a jewel they had taken into their house, and she herself experienced a strong attachment to the Sisters. She only complained that they were not sufficiently retired for her; so strong even then was her love of a hidden life.

At nine years of age she made her first Communion. God, Who had no intention that she should eventually remain there, now sent her a most severe trial. She was afflicted with a terrible attack of rheumatism, accompanied with partial paralysis. After two years, she was compelled to leave the convent, on account of her sufferings, and was taken home, where she continued for two years longer a prisoner to her bed.

It was during this malady that she made a vow to belong, if she was cured, in an especial manner to the Blessed Virgin; and the result was an instantaneous recovery. This seems to have been the date of that wonderful personal charge which the Blessed Virgin took of Margaret Mary. From that moment, the Mother of God, to use her own words, 'absolutely governed her; she reproved her for her faults, and taught her the will of God.'

Her life at her mother's house was most

austere. She spent four hours every day, as a regular rule, in prayer; frequently she would take no sleep; she fasted three days in the week, besides often giving the best part of her food to the poor; and, in addition to these practices, she wore an iron chain around her tender body. As if these voluntary mortifications were not enough, God, in His infinite wisdom, placed upon her a peculiar kind of cross, by which He led her to a high degree of humiliation and obedience. For some reason, not recorded, Margaret Mary's mother yielded up the entire management of her house to certain subordinates, who in a short time ruled everybody and everything with the most relentless authority. Margaret had no liberty of action: she could not go to church, or put on a dress, or even take a piece of bread from the table, without permission; she was accused of sins of which she had an indescribable horror, struck with blows, and forced to work as a common servant in her own mother's house.

The effect upon her soul was only to increase her thirst for conformity to Christ. 'From this time,' she says, 'my soul continued so penetrated with the sufferings of our Divine Saviour, that I should have desired my pains never to cease for a moment.'

These trials were followed by one of a to-

tally different kind. The persecution which she endured from the social and domestic tyranny of those who ruled her home was less hard to bear than the fear of displeasing and disappointing her mother. It was represented to her, when she had arrived at a proper age for marriage, that she ought to contract a desirable alliance, and thus secure her mother's comfort and peace during her widowed life. She remembered her vow as a child, and she determined to be firm; but occasionally, she confesses, the love of her mother and the dread of adding to her cup of sorrow were so strong that she allowed herself to mingle in society more than formerly. For a short period she lived a kind of double existence. Sometimes she was in high spirits, and allowed her natural attractiveness to flow out too exuberantly from her looks, deportment, and conversation, so that she ran a risk of being misunderstood by those who aspired to her hand. Without meaning it, she indirectly gave them hopes of success. This was one phase. But again and again it was alternated by immediate and agonising reactions; she was pierced to the heart at the thought of forsaking Jesus. 'Alas,' she said, 'He appeared jealous of my wretched heart;' then, as a relief, she would, on returning to her room after an evening's diversion,

fling aside her dress, ‘the accursed livery of Satan,’ as she termed it, and spend the long night in prostration on the ground wet with her tears, making the blood start by the sharp discipline of the scourge, and lying on a hard plank, or on knotty sticks, which she placed in her bed.

The Psalmist, speaking of God, says, ‘Thy arrows are fastened in me, and Thy hand hath been strong upon me’ (xxxvii. 2); and so it was with Margaret Mary. Notwithstanding the appeals made to her by her mother that she should accept some offer of marriage, and the temptation of breaking the galling yoke of those who were allowed to exercise an unjust authority over her, the ‘arrow of God’ was never plucked out of her heart by any selfish consideration. She was ready to undergo suffering, but not to violate the vow lisped by her infant lips, and which must ever be a barrier between her and the proposals of suitors, however advantageous. The Divine arrow was really ‘fastened’ in the centre of her soul, and if ever through a momentary thoughtlessness she seemed to be bounding away towards more worldly pastures, she felt the sharp pull of the barb with an intensity beyond description. At times, when she was excited by her imagination to think of the pleasures of society, the

illusion was suddenly scattered to the winds by a counter-image. The pale, blood-stained form of the Crucified appeared to rise up before her like an awful apparition ; and when it had passed, she shrank within herself, utterly confounded with the thought of her own frailty and ingratitude. Her only comfort was then in penance, in visits to the Blessed Sacrament, in teaching the Catechism to the most abandoned children that she could coax to come to her ; and, above all, in soothing the sorrows and dressing the wounds, often most loathsome, of the sick poor of the neighbourhood.

During this period of her residence with her mother there appeared, at first vaguely, and then in a more definite form, the seed of a vocation to religion. The idea fascinated her on the one hand with its exceeding sweetness, and on the other it terrified her with its sublimity and difficulty. All kinds of suggestions from the great adversary of souls came surging in upon her fancy. Hardly had the hope of success begun to shine brightly and calmly before her, leading her onwards, like the star which guided the Magi, when huge clouds, partly the offspring of her sense of unworthiness, and partly the malicious projection of the Evil One's shadow upon her mind, swept

between her and the Divine light, so that she was transfixed with an agony of depressing doubt. The graces received in the Sacrament of Confirmation, which was administered to her in 1669 by the Bishop of Châlons-sur-Saône, produced a remarkable effect, by strengthening her resolution to persevere in her aspirations towards religion ; and she also united herself in a special manner to the Blessed Virgin, by taking the name of Mary in addition to that of Margaret, thus stamping herself anew with the mark of her spiritual kinship to the Mother of God, and prophetically foreshadowing, as we shall see, her future enrolment amongst the 'Daughters of Mary.'

In 1670, on the occasion of the Jubilee granted by Clement X., a Franciscan Father came to preach in the village where Margaret Mary lived, and to him she confided the ardent desire of her soul. He encouraged her strongly, and so effectually pleaded her cause, that her mother and brother, who had hitherto opposed her wishes by reasonings and entreaties, at last agreed to what they saw was inevitable ; for she declared that she would rather die than renounce her intention.

Having yielded this point, her relatives imagined that Margaret Mary would readily defer to their wishes in the choice of an Order;

they were anxious for her to join the Ursulines, and in this they were supported by her cousin, who was a nun in an Ursuline community. The very motives, however, which they thought would weigh with Margaret Mary in favour of the Ursulines were in her mind precisely the reasons for resisting the idea. Nothing human was to be admitted as an element in the decision of what was to be the sole work of God. She had a horror of trying to combine personal likings, or the attraction of kinship, with the drawings of the Holy Spirit ; of putting untempered mortar between the sacred stones of the Temple. ‘ My wish,’ she said, ‘ is to go to a convent which is at a distance, and where I have neither relatives nor acquaintances, for I will be a Religious only for the sake of God ! ’

The names of many convents were mentioned to her, but she showed no signs of approval until she heard of the one belonging to the Order of the Visitation at Paray ; that name was no sooner uttered than it electrified her with a sudden sensation of delight. She could not explain her reasons ; they lay far too deep for her own intelligence to fathom ; it was the unseen hand of God that was ‘ strong upon’ her, and Paray seemed to shine out distinctly and vividly before her mind as the

only spot where she could henceforth live; it was as though it had been traced there long before in the 'invisible ink' of the writing of the Spirit of God, and had now started into glowing manifestation when the time arrived for her to forsake her home in the world. Paray was not a selection, but an inspiration.

The Order of the Visitation was founded by St. Francis of Sales, and it is interesting to remember that he proposed for its armorial bearings 'a heart pierced by two arrows, and encircled by a crown of thorns; this poor heart serving as a base for a cross surmounting it, and bearing engraved upon it the holy names of Jesus and Mary.' The chief virtues which the Saint desired the daughters of the Order to aim at more especially were humility producing the deepest reverence towards God, and gentleness sweet and charitable towards their neighbours; one of his sayings being that they were to 'gather these virtues at the foot of the Cross, where they grow, and are bedewed with the Blood of that Beloved Spouse Who is nailed to their hearts as He was to the Cross.' How the subsequent history of Margaret Mary gives the clue to her having been guided to this particular Order by the direct Providence of God is so obvious as to require no commentary.

Margaret Mary entered the quiet doors of the convent at Paray on the 25th of May 1671, the festival day of a Saint who may be said, in a sublime mystical sense, to have been beside herself through the love of Jesus —St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi. On the day when she prepared to leave the world behind her, the conflict between nature and grace was so strong, that she felt as if she was being riven in two; but no sooner had she passed the threshold of the convent than, like David before the Ark of God, she 'leaped and danced' with delight. After three months' postulancy, she was clothed on the 24th of August. During the whole of her noviceship she was pre-eminent for her thirst for prayer, and for the extraordinary simplicity which made her, who was exalted before her entrance into the Order to an unusual height of communion with God, look down upon herself as totally ignorant of the art of devotion. The mistress of novices told her to offer her heart to God as a piece of blank canvas, and ask Him to impress upon it His Divine will. This is what she had in reality always been doing, without any self-consciousness of the process; but she listened to the advice as if she were then only beginning to put it into practice. One of her great difficulties was to follow the ordinary

manner of prayer to which the rest of the community were accustomed. As soon as she commenced, she was borne off as by some irresistible influence into an ecstatic state, in which she had no sense of time or exterior things. The nuns at first were perplexed; they could not be quite sure if her conduct were eccentricity, or an illusion, or an extraordinary disposition of soul which it was beyond her own power to regulate. In order to test her, she was ordered to sweep the floors, and to work in the store-room, and to occupy herself in various menial offices.

But the bitterest cup that was presented to her was the threat to send her out of the convent, as unsuited to an Order whose holy ambition was simplicity in devotion, as in all other things. To console her, our Divine Lord gave her to understand that He would forego even His own directions to her soul, if they could not be obeyed without infringing the rules of her Superior.

What can be a more striking proof of the peculiar sacredness and importance which God attaches to the authority of those who hold office as Superiors in religious communities than the fact of Jesus Christ waiving, as it were, His own sovereign rights in their favour? He who revealed His own will to Mar-

garet Mary, and at the same time commanded her to follow that of her earthly Superior, for His sake, thus cast a great, and it might be added an awful, light upon the whole principle of religious perfection, and the part which the subjection of one creature to another bears in it. ‘Be thou always ready to obey,’ says Blosius in his *Spiritual Mirror*; ‘for the least work done from pure obedience is more pleasing to God than a great work performed from the motive of self-will. The abnegation of thine own will, thine own senses, and thine own seeking, is a sacrifice truly grateful to God. Obedience, which is the first daughter of humility, renders man fit for the reception of every kind of grace, and is the safest way to heaven.’

A blind world may consistently talk, in its ignorance, of the slavery and folly of a blind obedience to the will of a man; ‘the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he *cannot understand*’ (1 Cor. ii. 14).

But to Catholics, who know that there can be no real humility towards God where there is no scope for, or practice of, obedience to our fellow man, the incident related of Margaret Mary is full of suggestiveness; it is in itself a whole treatise of theology.

'I will dispense My favours to thee,' said our Lord to Margaret Mary, 'according to the spirit of thy rule, the will of thy Superiors, and thine own weakness. I am content that thou prefer the will of thy Superiors, whenever they shall forbid thee to do what I shall order thee; nevertheless I shall know how to make My designs succeed, even by means which may seem in opposition to them.'

The result was such a wonderful minute observance of the Rules of the Order by the novice, that all obstacles vanished, and on the 6th of November 1672 she was professed.

CHAPTER II.

HER VISIONS.

MARGARET MARY's life now became one amazing series of supernatural cravings on her part, and of internal communications and providential interventions on the part of her Divine Master. Amongst the many extraordinary favours which God poured like a torrent into her soul was that of imparting His will to her in supernatural visions. To give our readers any adequate idea of the singular majesty, the symbolical beauty, or the number and variety of these manifestations, is totally impossible within the necessarily limited space these pages. Each particular vision had its distinct purpose: sometimes it had a reference chiefly to Margaret herself, teaching her some mighty truth about the awful sanctity and justice of God: sometimes it disclosed to her the faults and perils of individual souls, members of the community at Paray, or otherwise, for whom she was inspired to pray and offer reparation by her own sufferings: or, again, she was consoled and strengthened un-

der diabolic persecutions, when the pressure was crushing her beyond human endurance. But although each vision had its own definite, temporary, and personal character, and the several features varied, yet all, if I may use the illustration, were united in one grand spiritual expression. The separate rays ever formed one changeless, dazzling light; the letters ever terminated in one message; the revelations were all preparatory to the unfolding of one ineffable mystery—the incomprehensible adorableness, power, mercy, and attraction of the Victim-Heart of God Incarnate. This is the true key to all the visions recorded in the life of Margaret Mary.

There are times when God in His love for man breaks forth through the clouds of His usual reserve, and in His Divine jealousy ‘compels men to come’ into His mercy by unusual modes of interposition; ‘He *reveals* His arm,’ and ‘*lifts up*’ His imploring voice, and enables the weak things of the world to be His angels upon earth, and to succeed where giants have failed. Such is the impression which the history of Margaret Mary, like that of other elect apostles, produces on the mind.

The account of her visions written by herself is preserved at Paray; and, although the Church has pronounced no judgment on their

precise nature or authority, the Decree of Beatification has strongly confirmed their credibility by mentioning her ecstasies, and an intimation from our Lord enjoining her to establish the devotion to His Sacred Heart. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that there could be a character more calculated than that of Margaret Mary to stamp the seal of reality upon her assertions.

'An objection is sometimes made,' says Father Faber,^{*} 'to accounts of miracles or celestial favours which could not be known except by the Saint's own disclosure. But the reader need not allow himself to be shaken by this; if he examines the rigid minuteness of the search after notes of vainglory instituted in the Congregation, he may acquiesce in this alternative that the Saint has mentioned it either under obedience, or else for the greater glory of God, as St. Paul mentioned things to his own credit, and Abbot John in Cassian, and St. Ignatius, and the Venerable Bellarmine. If the servants of God have either been canonised or beatified, we durst hardly suppose them guilty of falsehood on such a subject-matter as supernatural favours from Almighty God.'

Many visions alleged to be true have been

* *Essay on Beatification and Canonisation*, p. 103.

unquestionably fictitious, but it will be found that those who professed to have seen them were either intellectually weak, or suffering from a diseased brain, or subject to illusions of Satan, or that from vanity they invented fictions in order to create a sensation, and draw upon themselves the notice of others.

All the elements of possible suspicion were absent in the case of Margaret Mary. Intellectually she was open to no disparagement. Fr. Croiset, who knew her, says that she had 'a powerful understanding, and a solid, clear, and penetrating judgment.' However ill she might be, she was conspicuous for her fidelity to the rules of her Order, when it was possible to obey them ; and as for the desire of display, she was perpetually thirsting for humiliations : it gave her the most excruciating mental pain to write any account of her unusual graces. This repugnance is a strong proof of sanctity, whilst eagerness to communicate extraordinary Divine favours is always a suspicious fact.

The following supplication has been found amongst the many prayers recorded by her own hand : ' My Lord and my God, Who alone knowest the pain which I suffer in writing all this, and the violence which I am obliged to do to myself in order to overcome the repugnance and confusion which I feel, grant me the grace

to die rather than to say anything but what comes from the truth of Thy Spirit, and will give glory to Thee and confusion to myself.'

Our Lord told Margaret Mary that she would be able to distinguish His intimations from the wiles of Satan, her own self-love, or any merely natural cause, by the following marks : after a Divine communication, she would suffer humiliation from creatures, and be plunged into a profound sense of her own nothingness ; she would never feel contempt for others, no matter how clearly she saw the evil state of their hearts ; but, on the contrary, would only pity and pray for them. No interior revelations would ever incline her to fail in her obedience to the rules of her Superiors in the minutest points ; and finally, their tendency would be to lead her (1) to love Jesus Christ with a supreme affection ; (2) to obey perfectly His example ; (3) to suffer without the fact being perceived ; and (4) to have an insatiable thirst to communicate and to be before the Blessed Sacrament.

Amongst the criteria for testing the truth of supposed revelations, theological writers lay immense stress upon the virtue of self-abasement ; thus Hurtado says : 'I sum up all of them under one principle; a good life, good conduct, the practice of all virtues, and

above all, humility going before, accomplishing, and following. It is morally impossible that a soul profoundly humble can be culpably deceived.'

Cardinal Bona, in his treatise on the Discernment of Spirits, gives the following amongst other characteristics of the visions, apparitions, and revelations of St. Teresa, and proposes them as a general test of the value of all other alleged events of a similar kind. St. Teresa was afraid of diabolical illusions, and not only did not desire visions, but prayed that she might be led in the ordinary way; she obeyed her directors most carefully, and though exceedingly reluctant to manifest to others indiscriminately her Divine communications, she narrated them to her directors and to learned men with great frankness. He Who spoke to her interiorly reprehended her imperfections. She loved her persecutors. Her conversation inclined the most tepid to pious thoughts and affections. The visions usually came to her after fervent prayer and reception of the Holy Eucharist, kindling in her renewed love for God, and a most intense desire of suffering for Him. She subdued the flesh by severe castigation, tore herself from all human affection, rejoiced in tribulations, was equally tranquil in adversity and prosperity; and learned

men saw nothing in her visions, apparitions, and revelations inconsistent with faith, nor in any way blamable. Such is the picture presented to us of the reliable signs of real manifestations of a supernatural kind from God to one of His servants, and it is impossible to read these characteristics without being forcibly impressed with their perfect correspondence to those recorded in the life of Margaret Mary Alacoque.

So deep was her self-abasement that, notwithstanding the remarkable favours and graces of which she was constantly partaking, she was accustomed to say, ‘The abuse of grace which I have received is so great, that I have nothing in myself that does not deserve eternal punishment.’

We are not surprised indeed to find her humility declared in the decree of her beatification to have been marvellous. ‘There shone forth in her a wonderful humility’ (*mira humilitas*).

But, after the fear which she had of Satanic delusions, and her profound self-distrust, there was one virtue which above all others was her strong safeguard against error, and is a guarantee of the truth of her testimony, namely, the perfection of her obedience under every test that the most skilful of directors could

apply to her. Moreover, every species of opposition which was calculated to probe her to the quick, and break down whatever was unreal, only resulted in a glorious confirmation of her sanctity; whilst miracles* after her death, the foretold triumph of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, still gathering force every day in every country, and the decree of her beatification by Pius IX., all point to one conclusion, namely, that it is a rational duty as well as a spiritual delight to recognise in Margaret Mary that Divine Power which enables those giants in grace, the Saints, to 'walk with God,' although a blind world may stumble at the miraculous footprints that from time to time cross its path.

One of the first occasions on which our Lord showed Himself to her was when she was despondent through inability to conquer a certain repugnance, which was physical rather than moral; He appeared all covered with wounds, and declared that He was suffering through love of her because she could not for His sake conquer her will. On her pleading

* 'The opinion which had prevailed of the Venerable Margaret Mary's sanctity became more general after her death, especially when confirmed by repeated miracles which were said to have been wrought through the intercession of the venerable servant of God.' *Decree of Beatification.*

the weakness of her will, He told her to place it in the wound of His side; and her answer was, ‘Place it there, then, O my Saviour, and enclose it there so securely that it may never escape from it.’ After which she affirmed that everything became easy to her for the future. One day, the evening before her Communion, she beheld the Sacred Heart shining more dazzlingly than the sun, and far beyond that orb in size; but the Heart was not alone, for there could be discerned a small dark formless atom, which seemed ever straining to approach that splendour, and yet was ever unable to reach its glorious mark: then the Sacred Heart drew this tiny atom into Itself, with these words: ‘Lose thyself in My greatness, and see thou never come forth again.’ This atom was to represent the heart of Margaret Mary. On another occasion, when she was absorbed in prayer, the wound in the side of Jesus was disclosed to her; it was narrow at the entrance, and led to a fathomless abyss: this was to teach the depth of Christ’s love, and also the necessity of her soul to be little, and stripped of all attachment to creatures, in order to enter into those ineffable depths for safety, rest, and joy.

Our Lord also appeared to her with His head pierced with a circlet of nineteen sharp

thorns, saying that they pierced His brain, and bidding her to pluck them out by acts of humility : these thorns, He said, were wounds caused by the faults of one of the Religious in the community.

She also records having seen the following remarkable words written on the Sacred Heart : ‘ My love reigns in suffering, triumphs in humility, and rejoices in unity.’

Amongst other beautiful and strikingly symbolical modes in which our Lord pictured His will before the soul of Margaret Mary may be mentioned that which unfolded to her His Heart as a mystical garden, full of various and exquisite kinds of flowers, spreading around a wonderful beauty and fragrance. Margaret dared not touch them; but on being told by our Lord to gather what she liked, she cast herself at His feet, and exclaimed, ‘ I wish for none but Thyself, Who art a bundle of myrrh to me, which I should like to carry for ever in the arms of love.’

The Sacred Heart also appeared to her in the form of a tree, spreading its extensive branches throughout all the houses of the Order of the Visitation, to indicate the important part which they were to take in the diffusion of its reign over the hearts of men. She had also a singular vision, in which she

beheld her Lord inside the heart of a person who had just received Holy Communion unworthily, and He appeared with His sacred hands crossing His eyes and ears; a sign that He could not listen to the prayers of that soul which had just received Him with faulty dispositions. It would be too long to tell how she was permitted to lean upon His Heart like St. John, to apply her lips to His side for two or three hours, drawing thence the most unspeakable pleasure and strength; to staunch the wounds of His bleeding body; to see His Heart dragged about and lacerated by being forced into souls unfit for the Holy Eucharist; and at other times to watch It pouring forth streams of living water as a fountain into elect hearts, or darting rays of indescribable splendour from a throne of fire and flames on which It was exalted; or to feel her own heart drawn from her body, inserted into the glowing furnace of the Heart of Him Who came to 'kindle a fire upon the earth,' and then returned into its former spot, so that it seemed after that baptism of flame to be not so much her own heart as a living spark from the Heart of Jesus.

Upon another occasion, just before Lent, our Lord came before her bowed beneath His Cross, with the blood streaming on all sides,

and exclaiming, ‘ Will no one compassionate Me and take part in My sorrow in the piteous state to which sinners reduce Me, especially at this time?’ On hearing these words she threw herself at His bleeding feet, and then a cross, whose weight she could scarcely bear, and which was studded with sharp nails, was laid upon her shoulder; and she not only carried it, but fastened herself to it at His wish, in order that she might thus share in the outrages which He was undergoing from sinners.

The last-mentioned vision is remarkable, because it was accompanied by agonising pain in that part of her side from which her heart appeared to have been taken—a pain which our Lord foretold should always remain as a proof of the reality of His presence in that particular vision; just as in Jacob’s vision of old the sinew of his thigh shrank, and became a continual evidence that a real and not an imaginary angel had wrestled with him during the night, ‘ when he was alone;’ and at break of day touched the sinew, ‘ and forthwith it shrank’ (Gen. xxxii. 25). The pain in Margaret’s side could never be relieved, as our Lord told her, except by bleeding; and frequently, rather than consent to this alleviation, she preferred to suffer the torment in all its unmitigated severity.

CHAPTER III.

HER EXPIATORY SUFFERINGS.

ON the first Friday of every month the Sacred Heart regularly appeared to her, under the form of a blazing sun, which poured its scorching, yet vitalising, rays into her own breast. It was on one of these occasions that she received the following definite commands : (1) She was to communicate as often as she was not forbidden by her Superiors ; (2) she was to make a rule of communicating on the first Friday of every month ; and (3) she was to be plunged every night between Thursday and Friday into an agony of sadness and desolation, which should be a repetition, or rather a reflection, so to speak, within her soul of the terrible woe endured by her Lord in the Garden of Gethsemani ; she was to feel as if suffering it together with Him, and she was instructed to rise at eleven, and falling on her face, to remain prostrate on the ground for an entire hour. By this practice, our Lord gave her to understand that she should bear Him company as if she had been

in the Garden of Sorrows when the Apostles fell asleep through weariness, and that, whilst thus sweetening for Him some of the bitterness which their conduct had caused in His Heart, she should also implore mercy for sinners.

On several occasions our Lord condescended to make this elect spouse sympathise in His sorrows, not merely by bringing before her mind, in the form of a mental contemplation, the recollection of what He had undergone, but by so uniting her with Himself and the scenes of His suffering life, that, by a kind of mysterious intercommunion, she became, to adopt St. Peter's expression, a real 'partaker in the sufferings of Christ' (1 Peter iv. 13). She participated to an extraordinary degree in that fellowship 'of the Cross of Christ' by which, St. Leo says, 'we ourselves coöperate in some measure with that which He has achieved for us;' for 'if we suffer we shall also reign with Him,' writes the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. ii. 12). The Crucified drew her so closely to Him, that His thorns, spear, and nails entered mystically into her own being; she lived, in some sense, which it is beyond the power of human language to explain, the life of the Man-God, as He Himself declared that she should; and not only did she un-

dergo something akin to His pain, but again and again, when He was offended by the sins of others, she was told to appease His anger by suffering with Him, and at the same time by offering up those pains of her own as a mode of intercession for them. Her pains in themselves were worthless ; but such is the vicarious force of charity, such is the all-pervading effect of co-membership in that Church which is the 'Body of Christ,' such is the desire of the Head that His virtue should flow through secondary and inferior channels united with Himself, that many souls were restored to favour and pardon through Margaret's holy afflictions, whom their Lord would not have forgiven so easily, if at all, had she not thrown her mite of expiation into the treasury of that Heart of Jesus which had inspired and enabled her to present the offerings.

Incidents and revelations of this kind in the life of Blessed Margaret are a luminous commentary upon those deep words of St. Paul, '*I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His Body, which is the Church*' (Coloss. i. 24). 'The sufferings of Christ abound *in us*' (2 Cor. i. 5). 'We perish not, always bearing about *in our body* the mortification of Jesus' (2 Cor. iv. 10).

'I bear the marks of the Lord *in my body*' (Gal. vi. 17). 'With Christ I am nailed to the Cross' (Gal. ii. 19). Speaking of certain nuns who had failed in their duty to Jesus Christ, Margaret Mary says that He told her to charge herself with the burden of restoring them to His favour, and she succeeded; but she adds, 'I had to suffer much. Hell itself is not more dreadful than a heart deprived of the love of my Beloved.'

It is a matter of faith, the denial of which would be heresy, that Christ's sufferings were more than sufficient to redeem the world and atone for every sin that has been or could be committed by man. But it is no less true that Christ, in His own infinite wisdom, makes the application of this redemption and the gift of many graces to individuals dependent upon certain conditions. As incorporation into His Church, faith, hope, charity, prayers, obedience, and sacraments are undoubtedly necessary in order that we may share in the fruits of Christ's meritorious works, so also He makes suffering a means of this participation. If Christ is induced to grant many mercies for others if we pray for them, which He would not have conceded without our prayers, it is not difficult to understand that He may also lay crosses on some members

of His Church, in order that He may, in return for that penance, bestow unmerited favours upon others. As it is part of the dispensation of an Incarnate God to carry on His kingdom by the aid of 'fellow-workers,' so it is part of the same dispensation to carry it on by the aid of fellow-sufferers. The Church of Christ is 'one body,' and, as many of the Fathers say, the *suffering* of Christ and His Church is one, since their *life and soul* are one. 'Christ,' writes St. Augustine, 'is not only totally in the head, but also totally in the body.' Thus the sufferings of His living members are united to His own, even called His own, and therefore possess a special value in His sight. When Saul persecuted the Christians, He did not, says St. Augustine, call them His servants, or even His friends, but *Himself*: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' As also Jesus Christ delights in utilising, so to speak, every good work of His own children by drawing it into an exalting fellowship with His own obedience to His Heavenly Father, and making it fertile in advantages to the Church at large, so in various ways and degrees He seals the sufferings of others with the stamp of His own sacred Cross. And the holier His children are, the more frequently and deeply He invites them to help their

brethren by enduring hard sacrifices for their sakes : thus they like Him become poor, that others through their poverty may become rich.

Those who regard the redemption of man by Christ as a merely outward payment by Him of a debt due from guilty sinners to God, also regard the pardon of man and the relation that has been established between Christ and him as entirely external. They do not comprehend that the atoning act on the Cross was only the beginning of that mystery of love by which Christ the Second Adam incorporates us into Himself, so that as the branches live by the very life of the vine, and through the power of that imparted life 'bring forth fruit,' in like manner the Spirit of Jesus dwells in man. The Christian is said by St. Paul to be 'a new creature *in Christ*' (2 Cor. v. 17); to have '*Christ in him, the hope of glory*' (Col. i. 27); '*the Holy Ghost dwelleth in us*' (2 Tim. i. 14); and Christ is described as '*our life* ;' not our future life only, but our *present life*—'*Christ, Who is your life*,' says St. Paul (Col. iii. 4). '*Abide in Me and I in you*,' is our Lord's own command (John xv. 4). '*Not I but Christ liveth in me*,' is the Apostle's description of himself (Gal. ii. 20). '*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit*,' *i.e.* one spirit

with Christ (1 Cor. vi. 17); and we are also declared to be 'members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' (Eph. v. 30). Our Lord moreover prayed not for the Apostles only, but 'for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they may be one in Us . . . that they may be one, as We also are One' (John xvii. 20-23). What Catholic language can go beyond these words? This is the true Gospel, and they who believe it recognise the sacred value of the actions and sufferings of those who are vitally united to Jesus Christ. Any other Christianity is a human fiction and not a Divine reality.

In further illustration of the peculiar expiatory office which our Lord frequently charged our Saint to fulfil in behalf of others, we may here mention that she suffered in an especial manner during every carnival, on account of the excesses that were then committed; her mental anguish caused always a severe bodily illness; but as soon as Ash Wednesday came, she was well and cheerful. In one of these states of suffering, she was told by our Lord that 'a single holy soul could obtain pardon from God for a thousand sinners.' On the other hand, what a warning glimpse of the

rigour of the Divine justice, with regard to the dispensation of His mercy through Indulgences, is presented to us in these words, addressed to Margaret Mary during a Jubilee ! After saying that His own people ' persecute Him by their familiarities,' He bids Margaret to ' weep and sigh for His Blood uselessly shed for so many souls who make so great an abuse of it in these Indulgences ; they are content to cut down the bad weeds which have grown in their hearts, without wishing to pluck them up by their roots.'

Sometimes our Lord, in order to save a soul which was on the point of being lost for ever, would make His servant feel the frightful agony of a reprobate sinner at the point of death ; with reference to which she said : ' I never experienced anything so horrible ; I have no words to explain it.'

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER DE LA COLOMBIÈRE.

At the close of 1674 an event took place which formed a signal epoch in Margaret Mary's life. She had undergone much ridicule and rough treatment from some members of her community, in whose erroneous judgment she was looked upon as a visionary enthusiast, the dupe of fanciful impressions. Even the priests of Paray were for some time of the same opinion, which they did not hesitate to openly avow.

Margaret Mary felt keenly this undeserved imputation; but instead of resenting it with a severe protest against its temerity and want of charity, she humbly raised up her heart to God, and He so disposed events as to send a director distinguished for sanctity and wisdom to the house of the Jesuits at Paray. His name was Father Claude de la Colombière. As soon as Margaret saw him, she knew that he was sent to her by the special will of God; he also had the same conviction the very mo-

ment he beheld her ; and to confirm the fact in an irresistible manner, the following vision was granted to Margaret :

As she was going up to the altar, our Lord showed to her His Sacred Heart, glowing like a furnace ; and then two other hearts appeared to enter into and be lost in its abyss, whilst she heard internally these words, ‘ It is thus that My pure Heart unites these three hearts eternally.’ She then was made to understand that our Lord intended to make herself and Father de la Colombière the peculiar instruments for spreading abroad the glory and treasures of the Heart of Jesus. She was first to unfold to him, in a way hitherto unexperienced by himself, the value of that Heart, and Its power over the hearts, and for the salvation of, sinners. And when she began deplored to God her unworthiness to be associated with such a superior agent as Father de la Colombière, our Lord said to her, ‘ The infinite riches of My Heart will equalise and supply everything.’

Father de la Colombière made a most strict examination of his penitent’s soul, and after watching her conduct as proved by most severe tests applied to her in order to ascertain her humility, love of mortification, and obedience, and after comparing all those lights from na-

ture, grace, and the evidence of others which were valuable as crucial testimonies, he came to the undoubting conclusion that her alleged illuminations, ecstasies, and spiritual intimations were really the work of God. That he was to be in some manner a fellow-apostle of the Sacred Heart together with Margaret Mary, he knew from what she had told him about the vision of the three united hearts. But he was hitherto only, as it were, tentatively feeling his way in the twilight; the mists were still around him, although gradually moving off; he experienced an unusual desire to love more than ever the Heart of Jesus, but it was not until the summer of 1675 that the light fell clearly upon the design of his Lord and Master.

One day, during the Octave of Corpus Christi in the above-mentioned year, Margaret was kneeling a little behind the railing in the choir of the Sisters; the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the high altar, and as she gazed upon It she felt moved to offer our Lord some fresh return for His love. In reply, our Lord said, disclosing to her at the same time His Heart: ‘Look at this Heart, which has loved men so much that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and, in re-

turn, I receive from the greater part only ingratitude, because of the contempt, irreverence, sacrilege, and coldness which they show Me in this Sacrament of love. . . . On this account, I ask of you that the first Sunday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special feast to honour My Heart by communicating on that day, and making reparation to It by a solemn act, in order to repair the indignities It has received during the time It has been exposed on My altars. I also promise you that My Heart shall expand Itself, so as to shed in abundance the influence of Its Divine love upon those who shall pay It this honour, and procure It to be paid.' Margaret Mary, overwhelmed by this intimation, complained of her inability to carry out the will of her Lord. He then reminded her how He chooses the weakest things to confound the strong, that they may attribute nothing to their own powers, and finally gave her the following explicit command: 'Address thyself to My servant (indicating Father de la Colombière), and tell him from Me to do what he can to establish the devotion, and to give pleasure to My Divine Heart. Let him not be discouraged at the difficulties which he will meet with, for there will be no lack of them; but he must remember that those are all-

powerful who distrust themselves and place their whole confidence in Me.'

The immediate result was that Father de la Colombière on the Friday after that Octave (June 21, the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga) consecrated himself to the Sacred Heart; and from that moment commenced to flow the river of this most profound and soul-melting practice of piety—at first a small rill, but afterwards destined to gather volume and intensity, until the whole world has begun to be conscious of its fertilising current.

CHAPTER V.

TRIBULATIONS AND DEATH.

SATAN, the great enemy of man from the Creation, and especially of those souls who are the most complete representatives upon earth of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, did not forbear to annoy Margaret Mary with his malicious attacks. Sometimes he endeavoured to destroy her trust in God by filling her imagination with desponding ideas; sometimes he assumed a visible form of horrible loathsomeness; once he threw her down headlong from the top to the bottom of some stairs, whilst she was carrying a brazier of burning coals, in the presence of several Sisters, who were astonished to see that not a single ember was thrown out of the pan by a shock violent enough, as they considered, to have broken both of her legs. But the most distressing of these diabolic assaults was a ravenous hunger for food: the singularity of it consisting in the indisposition she experienced for food when it was placed before her, and the instantaneous

return of hunger as soon as ever the food was removed. The diabolic torments were, however, trifling compared to another trial, which came partly from the hand of God, and partly from the community at Paray.

She was in this respect only treading the usual path of the Saints.* At one time, for instance, the seraphic St. Teresa was so discredited that she could not prevail upon any priest to hear her confessions, and she was also denounced to the Inquisition. ‘In all causes,’ says Benedict XIV., ‘it is to be sedulously inquired whether the servants of God suffered distresses, and what sort of distresses, and with what patience and charity they bore them.’

Hence it has been truly said that ‘suffering, and of all sufferings especially the persecution and opposition of good men, seems to be an *inseparable accident* of sanctity, so soon as and so far as it is heroic.’ So important an element of sanctity is this peculiar kind of mortification considered by the Church, that the Congregation of Rites, in examining the case of any one who is proposed for canonisation, rigorously investigates ‘the falling away of his friends, the ridicule of the world, and

* Fr. Faber’s *Essay on Beatification and Canonisation*. See pp. 37-43.

the opposition even of good men, as though these afflictions and thwartings were, so to speak, authentications which Providence is sure to give to heroic virtue.'

Margaret Mary was told by her Lord that, in order to propitiate His mercy for certain faults of His elect spouses, she must become a victim of immolation. For this end He disclosed to her His offended justice in such an awful manner, that she says, 'it seemed as though I saw hell opened to swallow me up. I felt as if I was burning all through the marrow of my bones; my whole body quivered, and I could only cry out, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to the greatness of Thy mercies.'" Prostrate as she was, through being unable to move, eat, or explain the depth of agony in which she was ever sinking lower as into a fathomless abyss, and tormented by Satan besides, she drank the last dregs of confusion when she found herself regarded by many of the religious as a hypocrite; by others as possessed by the devil; and by almost all as a morbid visionary, who would be best cured by being roughly handled. Signs of the Cross were made over her, and she was sprinkled with holy water, and dragged violently about through the convent. Her only thought was how best to carry out one of

her own maxims, ‘ If I had a thousand bodies, a thousand loves, and a thousand lives, I would sacrifice all in order to serve Thee, my God.’ Afterwards, all who had through ignorance treated Margaret as the dupe of a diseased fancy or of the devil’s arts, instead of being what she was—a victim of the love and sanctity of God, whom He chose thus to assimilate to Himself—confessed their error; and the Saint’s character shone forth more brilliantly than ever in its wonderful simplicity and humility.

The above-mentioned trial took place on the 20th of November 1677. On the last day of December 1678, Margaret Mary made a complete oblation of her whole being to our Lord, in the form of a mystical testament; she offered also all the good that she might ever do in her life, or that might be done for her after her death, beseeching the Adorable Heart to dispose of it as He wished, for the advantage of any one, alive or dead, whom He should choose for that participation.

In token of her sincerity, she cut with a penknife the name of Jesus upon her breast, over the heart; our Lord then intimated to her that He, in return, made her the heiress of His Heart and all its treasures, and that

she was freely to use this amazing mercy for the benefit of sinners, and that He would never fail to have pity upon them at her intercession. As the words were dictated to her, she wrote them all down in her own blood. In reference to this will, it is narrated that when the tracing over her heart became slightly lessened in distinctness, she burned the place with a lighted taper, thus causing a wound so severe that she was obliged to mention the fact to the Mother Superior, Madame Greyfié. Upon this she was ordered to show the wound to one of the Sisters. Margaret, however, full of confusion at the circumstance being known, prayed to God for a cure; and her prayer was heard, for when the Sister saw the place, she found, as she herself deposed, a great scar, forming the letters 'Jesus,' in similar characters to those which are 'stamped with moulds on large books.' As a correction, however, for some slight act of disobedience to the Mother Superior, our Lord told her that the tracery should entirely disappear; and such was discovered to be the case when the Sisters laid out her body after her death.

In 1682, Margaret Mary sustained a great loss in the death of Father de la Colombière, who, after being banished from England in

1679, and having undergone various labours for the salvation of souls, expired at Paray, according to Margaret's prediction. In May 1684, Margaret Mary was made assistant to the new Mother Superior of the convent, Marie Christine Melin; and six months afterwards, in consequence of the illness of the mistress of the novices, Margaret Mary was appointed in her place.

She was ever watchful to lead those who had the happiness of being under her guidance to higher perfection in motives and action; but whilst she was full of humility and gentleness, she was ever most firm in expecting the strictest obedience to her commands as Superior, and even to the slightest expression of her wishes, saying that without this readiness and integrity of obedience it was impossible to conquer thoroughly the natural attachment to self-will.

'The soul of obedience,' she said, 'consists in having no will of our own, in refusing ourselves every desire, or in not permitting ourselves to have any desire which is not entirely submissive; in being always ready to give over our own views, illuminations, and inclinations in deference to the inclinations, views, and lights of our superiors.'

Many of her instructions to her novices have

been preserved, and occasionally she put them in writing at their especial request.

We give the following as an illustration of the kind and style of her exhortations :

On one occasion she wrote thus to her spiritual daughters :*

'Behold, my dear children, you force me to write what I have said to you, particularly concerning the Sacred Heart of our Lord ; but if you do not profit by it, I will myself ask Him to punish you ; that is, if you should forget or despise it. Take care, for I warn you frequently of this ; the grace that our Lord has begun in you will raise you to a high degree of perfection, provided you allow it a free course by a faithful correspondence on your part. Like the rising sun, you must advance and gather strength as you go. Your names are written in the adorable Heart, but as yet only with ink ; you are but beginners, and grace comes to enlighten your darkness, to assist you to combat and vanquish your imperfections, especially that natural pride which creeps in everywhere. Your names will be written in characters of silver, when your intentions, purified in the furnace of pure love, shall no longer retain anything human and

* *Life of Ven. M. M. Alacoque*, vol. ii. p. 55,
Oratorian Series.

terrestrial. But you must not be satisfied with this; your names must be written at full length in the Heart of Jesus in characters of gold. It is pure love that will cause you to attain to this happiness; you will then be, as it were, holocausts entirely consumed in the fire of holy charity, the centre of which is the Heart of our Saviour. To arrive there, you must suffer with love, offer a continual violence to yourselves, and mortify and humble yourselves through love. When, then, you commit some act of pride or self-love, such as excusing yourselves, or endeavouring to insinuate yourselves into the esteem or friendship of creatures, or when you do anything, either in word or action, that you would not wish to have done to yourselves, these actions are as so many letters of your names which you thus efface from the Divine Heart of our Master.'

In her instructions for Advent she proposes these amongst other resolutions, evidently drawn from her own practice :

'When I go to recreation, I will be attentive to recreate the Heart of Jesus, by speaking willingly of Him, by consecrating all my conversation to the Divine Word, that He may not permit me to say anything contrary to His glory, and by cheerfully accepting the

humiliations and contradictions that I may meet with.

‘ When I am oppressed with heat, I will beg Him Who is the burning furnace of pure love, so to inflame our hearts with this Divine fire, that being consumed they may become all love, in order to love Him incessantly.

‘ When I suffer thirst, it shall be in honour of that which the adorable Heart of Jesus experiences for the salvation of men, and that He may be known, adored, and loved by them in the Sacrament of His love.’*

Margaret Mary was fervent in recommending to her novices a constant devotion to the Sacred Heart; and in order to further her wishes, they erected a little altar, upon which they placed a pen-and-ink picture of the Sacred Heart. This is the earliest instance of any public manifestation of devotion to the picture of the Heart of Jesus; but, strange to say, the fervour of the mistress and her novices only served to bring upon all of them a severe cross; for some of the Sisters, when they were invited to join in the devotion, not only refused, but severely blamed Margaret Mary for introducing novelties and violating the spirit of the rule of the Order.

* *Life of Ven. M. M. Alacoque*, vol. ii. p. 69,
Oratorian Series,

Our Lord had told His servant that His Heart would reign, in spite of all opposition to It; and the change of the current came in a manner as striking as it was unexpected. In 1686, Margaret Mary had a vision of St. Francis of Sales, in which he told her that the devotion of the Sacred Heart was to be the principal means of preserving his Order from the danger of falling away from its true spirit. Mdme. Greyfié, formerly Mother Superior of Paray, and now of Semur, was so impressed by this revelation that she erected an oratory, and placed in it a picture of the Sacred Heart; of this picture she sent a miniature copy to Margaret Mary; and on the last day of the Octave of Corpus Christi, Margaret Mary, to her surprise, received a request from one of the Sisters that she would allow that little picture to be exposed in the choir. The name of that Sister was Mary Magdalen des Escures, and she was one of those who, from mistaken but conscientious motives, had been hitherto a most determined opponent of the devotion. This was only a beginning of victory. On the 21st of June 1686, the first stone of a chapel within the enclosure of the convent at Paray, in honour of the Sacred Heart, was laid, and Margaret Mary, with her novices, sang a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving. Her grand ab-

sorbing love was now somewhat satisfied ; 'I have now,' she said, 'nothing more to desire, since the Sacred Heart is known, and begins now to reign over the hearts of others.' On the 7th of September 1688, a nun was seen in that chapel, then completed, rapt and motionless in prayer ; a procession of many priests and laymen entered, and for two hours the building resounded with sounds of supplication and joy ; but Margaret Mary—for it was she—never stirred ; she felt and saw nothing but her own annihilation, and the ineffable grandeur and sweetness of that Heart Which had become the ceaseless home, refuge, stay, peace, and bliss of her own.

It was in the same year (July 2d, 1688) that Margaret Mary was told, in a remarkable vision, that the Order of the Visitation and the Society of Jesus were to be the two especial instruments in spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart. The Sacred Heart appeared on a throne, the whole church being lighted up and sensibly heated by the burning rays that streamed from Its wound. On one side was the Blessed Virgin, and on the other stood St. Francis of Sales and Father de la Colombière ; whilst around them were grouped the Daughters of the Visitation and their angel-guardians. The Blessed Virgin told these

Daughters that the treasure of her Son's Heart was especially manifested to them on account of His love for their Order; and turning to Father de la Colombière, added that the particular office of the Society of Jesus would be to 'make known the usefulness and value of the Sacred Heart, that all men might profit by it.' St. Francis of Sales also charged his daughters to make 'the love of It their constant exercise.'

Two years after the above vision, Margaret Mary foretold the approach of the time for her departure from this land of exile. 'I shall not live much longer,' she said, at the end of July 1690, 'for I have no longer anything to suffer; I shall certainly die this year, in order that I may not hinder the great fruit which our Divine Lord designs to produce, by means of a book of devotion to the Sacred Heart.' This prophecy evidently referred to a book commenced by Father Croiset, S.J., in 1690, but whose publication was unavoidably delayed until the next year, thus enabling him to give an account of Margaret Mary's wonderful life and graces; a circumstance which providentially gave immense force to the recommendation of the object of the work, and also fulfilled her prediction.

It was the custom of the nuns to make an

annual retreat, and on being asked if she wished to join it, for she was in a very feeble state of body, she replied, 'Yes; but it will be the *great* retreat.' During the retreat she was confined to her bed, but the usual medical attendant of the convent had seen Margaret Mary so often recover when on the brink of death, that he thought there was no real danger. She, however, earnestly begged to have the Holy Viaticum brought to her, and she communicated with, if possible, more than usual fervour. She refused all alleviation of her painful discomfort, saying, 'that time was too precious not to turn it to the best account.' Then a shadow of the justice of God seemed to pass through her soul for a few moments, and she trembled; but a glow of radiant peace, yearning, and joy soon almost transfigured her emaciated face. Often she exclaimed, 'O, what a delight it is to love God! Beg pardon of Him for me, and love Him with all your hearts, to make amends for the time during which I have failed so to do.'

Her humility was, next to her love, 'her strong passion' even in death, and some of her latest words were a request that the Mother Superior would promise never to reveal anything to her own advantage that she might have told her in the intimacy of confidence

and obedience ; and she earnestly besought one of the Sisters to write to Father Rolin begging him to burn all her letters, and to be silent on those matters on which she had requested him to observe complete secrecy. As her whole thoughts and affections centred in her Lord, so the last word that the two Sisters whose arms were supporting her had the supreme happiness to hear from her dying lips was the name of Jesus. This sweet omnipotent word was breathed out together with her soul ; and safe under its shield, penetrated through and through with its fragrance, and borne on high exultant through its triumphant might, she passed from her poor cell into the merciful embrace of Him to Whom she was ‘ faithful even to death,’ and from Whom she was to receive her own ‘ crown of glory.’

In her prayers she had often exclaimed, ‘ Come, O Life of my heart, O Soul of my life, the only Support of my being. O Love more ardent than fire, more sweet than honey, grant that I may die consumed with the ardour of Thy fire, as Thou hast been willing to die of love for me. O devouring Fire of the Divinity, come and dissolve me, burn me, and consume me in the midst of Thy pure flames, which cause those who die in them to live.’ And now

her painful languishing was fully satisfied, the 'martyrdom,' as she called it, of being in the body was over, and, in the beautiful words of the Decree of her Beatification, 'wasted not so much by disease as by the fire of Divine charity, she departed this life on the 17th of October in the year 1690.'

Great as is the glory of all the Saints of the Church, on account of their extraordinary virtues, there is a peculiar kind of immortality about that of Margaret Mary Alacoque; for as her name will ever be associated with the history and spread of the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so it will be for ever encircled by the reflected light of Its infinite splendour.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLDEN SAYINGS OF MARGARET MARY.

I BELONG for ever to my Beloved as His slave, His handmaid, and His creature. He is wholly mine, and I am His unworthy spouse, Sister Margaret Mary, dead henceforth to the world. Wholly from God, and nothing from myself; wholly to God, and nothing to myself; wholly for God, and nothing for myself.

We can love Jesus Christ only so far as we love the Cross.

I have such a desire for the Holy Sacrament, that if I had to walk barefoot over flames, it seems to me that it would cost me nothing in comparison with the loss of such happiness.

All things find their rest only in their centre; my heart is wholly buried in its centre, which is the most humble Heart of Jesus. It finds therein a burning thirst for humiliations, contempts, and utter forgetfulness of creatures, for I can never feel so happy as when I am conformed to my Crucified Spouse.

Every morning when I pray, I present myself to my God as a sick person before an all-powerful Physician, and apart from Whom I can find no refuge or comfort whatever. I have no other impression or movement but that of loving God, and I would willingly give a thousand lives, if possible, to testify to Him the desire and ardour which consume me.

I have nothing to offer Thee, O my God, that is not unworthy of Thee, except Thy well-beloved Son—the possession of Whom Thou givest me with so much love.

So dear to me is the loving will of God, that I would rather see my body exposed to all the furies of hell than do anything contrary to His good pleasure.

It is of little consequence, O my Jesus, in what Thou employest me; my whole time is Thine, not mine.

There is no kind of punishment which I would not have chosen to undergo rather than bear the presence of this God of sanctity, when my soul was blemished with any fault; I would rather a thousand times have thrown myself into a burning furnace.

Do what Thou pleasest, O Lord, and it is sufficient for me.

If I had a thousand bodies, a thousand

loves, and a thousand lives, I would sacrifice them all in order to serve Thee.

The Cross is my glory, and my way to it is by love. Love reigns supreme over me ; love alone is sufficient for me.

I see more clearly than the day that a life without the love of Jesus Christ is the greatest possible misery.

Strike, O my God ! burn, consume, all that displeases Thee. Spare not my body, my life, my flesh, my blood, provided Thou save eternally this soul.

Our Divine Lord has assured me that those who are employed in labouring for the salvation of souls shall have the art of touching the most hardened souls, and will labour with marvellous success if they are themselves penetrated with a tender devotion to His Sacred Heart.

As regards persons in the world, they will find in this devotion all the helps necessary for their state of life, peace in their families, relief in their toils, the blessing of heaven on all their undertakings, and comfort in their difficulties.

O, what a happiness to die, after having constantly had during life a devotion to the Heart of Him Who is to be our Judge !

My soul suffers extreme anguish at being

unable as yet to be separated from my body. The greatest sacrifice that I can make is that of continuing to live. I accept this, however, even to the Day of Judgment, if my God so wills it, though the thought of being kept apart from my Sovereign Good is harder to bear than a thousand deaths.

I see nothing in myself but what deserves eternal punishment.

Jesus Christ wishes to have the love and homage of His creatures from a free and loving heart, without constraint or dissimulation.

I shall die happy now that the Sacred Heart of my Saviour begins to be known and myself unknown; for it seems to me that I am now, by His mercy, almost annihilated in point of esteem and reputation in the minds of others. This gives me greater consolation than I can express.

Forget yourself, and Jesus will think of you. Lose yourself in the abyss of your own nothingness, and you will possess Him.

Endeavour especially to preserve peace of heart; the way to secure this is no longer to have any will, but to take that of the Sacred Heart in place of our own. It will love God for you, and you will love Him in It and by It.

I have never known how to love my God perfectly. O, what a happiness to love God! Love, then, this Love, and love Him perfectly.

I feel only a perfect acquiescence in the good pleasure of God, and an unspeakable pleasure in suffering.

My desire to be forgotten and despised after my death is not less than my wish to be so during my life.

Though God wishes to save us, it is His will that we should contribute our part towards this work, otherwise He will do nothing; for this reason we must resolve to suffer.

Trials suffered with patience are worth a thousand times more than any austerity.

Our hearts are made for Jesus Christ alone, and so can find no repose, joy, nor consolation, except in Him.

The gift of the pure love of Jesus is never idle in the heart in which it dwells.

The greatest bitterness is only sweetness in that Adorable Heart, where everything is changed into love.

To love God without suffering is only an illusion.

We must not reason with self-love, for it is nourished and increased by reflection.

Our hearts are so small that they cannot contain two loves, and being made for Divine Love alone, they find no rest when divided by any other affection.

Love will not have a divided heart; it wishes for all or nothing; love will make all things easy for you.

You will not love Jesus until you know how to suffer in silence.

Nothing is little when it is sacrificed to God from a motive of pure love.

The Adorable Heart of Jesus requires of Its friends poverty in intention, humility in operation, and unity in object.

Be faithful in making a good use of time, employing it for the purpose for which it is destined, and as if it were to be the last of your life.

Let us belong entirely to God by love, to our Superiors by submission, and to our neighbour by charity.

It is better to give up everything and to lose everything rather than to lose the favour of the Adorable Heart of Jesus.

We must fight against ourselves to the end, and die with our arms in our hands, for the crown is given only to the victorious.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TITLE OF VENERABLE—HEROIC VIRTUE.

ON the 30th of March 1824, Margaret Mary Alacoque was declared Venerable; on the 23d of August 1846, her virtues were pronounced to have been heroic; on the 24th of April 1864, the truth of certain miracles attributed to her was affirmed; and on the 18th of September in the same year, thousands of voices swelled the *Te Deum* in the Basilica of St. Peter's at Rome, when she was solemnly beatified by Pius IX.

For the benefit of those of our readers who are desirous of understanding the exact meaning of the above-mentioned acts and titles of honour, we proceed to give an explanation, which we hope will be sufficiently full and intelligible for our present purpose.

THE TITLE OF VENERABLE.

This name is, strictly speaking, only applied to a person after the Supreme Pontiff has signed what is called the Commission of Introduction, and which is addressed to the Congregation of

Rites. By this act the fame of a person's sanctity is affirmed to have been judicially proved, and the whole case is taken out of the cognisance of the local Bishops and Ordinaries, and placed under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, but no authorisation is thereby given to the permission of any worship of the person called Venerable.

HEROIC VIRTUE.

The word 'virtue' is sometimes used to signify moral excellence in general, without distinguishing whether it be natural or supernatural, that is, whether it proceeds from ordinarily human motives, independent of Divine grace, and having a natural end for its object; or from spiritual motives, with the aid of superhuman power, and for a supernatural end. It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to observe that the heroic virtue which is required by the Church to have been possessed by those whom she places amongst the Saints is Divine and Christian virtue, springing from union with Christ, and infallibly tending to the attainment of eternal life.

By *heroic* Christian virtue is to be understood that preëminently high degree of excellence by which he who practises it acts in a more exalted way than ordinary men act in

the exercise of the same virtue. This is the most general idea conveyed by 'heroicity,' and which is found in all the various definitions, which theologians have given of the term.* 'Heroic virtue,' writes Cardinal Capisucchi, 'is that which either because of the excellence of the work, or the presence of some circumstance which makes the work very difficult, exhibits itself in some act which surpasses the ordinary human standard of working, so that a man is then said to work heroically when he works beyond the ordinary measure even of men working virtuously.'

Such is the description of 'heroic virtue' in general: when a virtue reaches that point of superiority which marks a person off from the average altitude of others who also act righteously, it is called 'heroic'; but as there are degrees in ordinary virtue up to the point of heroicity, so there are indefinitely ascending degrees in heroicity, by which some Christian heroes differ from others in glory.

The next question we have to consider is what is to be understood by the term 'heroic virtue,' when officially used by the Catholic Church in reference to the question of Beatification and Canonisation. To illustrate our point, it is said in the Decree of the Beatifi-

* Benedict XIV. on *Heroic Virtue*, Eng. trans.

cation of Margaret Mary Alacoque, that the Apostolic See, having inquired into her virtues, had decided and 'declared on the 23d of August that they had reached an heroic degree.'

It is to be observed that the plural number is here used; 'her *virtues*' were declared to have been heroic: nor is this a merely accidental use of language, for it would not be sufficient for a Beatification to prove that a person had been heroic in many acts of one or two virtues, or in a few acts of several virtues.

No person can be beatified unless it is shown by the most rigorous testimony that he has reached the heroic degree in all the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and especially charity. 'It is not enough,' says Benedict XIV., 'if the heroic habit of faith be proved by several heroic acts of the virtue of faith; but it is *further requisite* that the heroic habits of other theological and cardinal virtues be proved by other acts.' Heroicity is absolutely required in the theological virtues, because without their illumination and controlling power it would not be possible to elicit the cardinal virtues in their utmost intensity.

In respect to the cardinal virtues—pru-

dence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—heroicity is necessary in those virtues which have a distinct bearing upon the special duties of a person's state of life, but it is not requisite that heroicity should have been shown in all four equally or at all times. 'It is necessary,' says Benedict XIV., 'that the existence of the cardinal or moral virtues should be proved, not always, however, but sometimes, by heroic actions, and sometimes by ordinary ones, the necessity of heroic actions being restricted to those virtues in which the servant of God whilst he lived was able to exercise himself *according to his state and condition of life*; for nothing, according to St. Thomas, hinders but that a virtuous man may be furnished with the material of one virtue, but not with that of another, as a poor man has the material of temperance, but not that of magnificence.' Hence Cassian says: 'One man is adorned with the flowers of knowledge, another is more strongly guarded by discretion, another has the settled foundation of patience, another is remarkable for the virtue of humility, another for that of continence, and the ornament of another is the grace of simplicity. This Saint excels in his magnanimity, that in his compassion; one in watchings, another in holy silence, another in labour.'

To complete the full idea of heroic virtue, it must be added, in conclusion, that besides the difficulty of the virtuous work in itself, which constitutes the chief cause of its extraordinary excellence — a difficulty to be measured by the circumstances of each case— heroicity will not be proved unless it be shown that the virtuous acts were manifold, and performed, not only with self-abnegation, but also with promptitude, ease, and delight. Heroic virtue also requires, says Cardinal de Aguirre, ‘that no action must be omitted which would be admirable and perfect relatively to the several circumstances of person, time, and place wherein it ought to be exercised.’

Lastly, heroic virtue demands that there should have been not occasionally magnificent manifestations of excellence, but a continuous perseverance in them up to the hour of death; for it is this sublime unchangeable pursuit after higher and higher perfection that is so victorious over the fickleness and cowardice of nature, and produces that similitude to God which theologians describe as one of the signal effects of that habit which constitutes men truly Saints.

They are to be called heroes, says F. Martin de Esparza, who ‘particularly up to the time of their death have persevered in a con-

tinuous uninterrupted course of innocence of life, doing everything according to the evangelical precepts and counsels with those circumstances in each action which tend to the summit of perfection as to their substance and manner, with a firm and intense contempt of all earthly things, and a corresponding adhesion to God and divine things.'

Perseverance is a necessary element in heroicity, for, as St. Bernard says, 'it is the essence of all strength and the consummation of all virtue.'

It must not, of course, be supposed that no one can be beatified or canonised unless his entire life *from its beginning* has been ceaselessly innocent, as far as is compatible with the imperfection of a creature; for men are accounted Saints on two grounds—that of innocence, like St. Aloysius of Gonzaga, and also of penitence, like St. Margaret of Cortona; but in any case sufficient proof must be given of final sanctity to an heroic degree at the hour of departure from life; for this reason also martyrs are entitled to a rank amongst the Saints. Much more evidence, however, as Benedict XIV. declares, is needed to prove before the eyes of the Church the sanctity of the penitent than the sanctity of the innocent.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AFFIRMATION OF MIRACLES.

THE proof of miracles wrought during the lifetime of the person, and also after death by impetration or relics, is required before Beatification or Canonisation can take place. For, as Pope Gregory IX. declared on the occasion of the Canonisation of St. Anthony of Padua, ‘two things are necessary in order that a man may be accounted in the Church Militant as a Saint; namely, in morals—virtue; and in wonderful deeds—truth; that is to say, merits and miracles. So that each may conjointly witness to the other, since neither merits without miracles nor miracles without merits are fully adequate to establish amongst mankind the testimony of sanctity.’

‘Virtue,’ also wrote Pope Innocent III., ‘is required because some men do good works in order that they may be seen by men, and some sparkle with miracles whose life, however, is deservedly condemned.’

With regard to the strictness of the ordeal through which every alleged extraordinary

action of a servant of God is compelled to pass in order to satisfy its title to be judged miraculous, we cannot do better than quote the following remarks of Father Faber in his most valuable *Essay on Beatification and Canonisation*, which, for accuracy of statement, fulness of matter, and lucidity of style, considering its brevity, has no equal. ‘Putting out of view,’ he says, ‘all idea of Divine assistance, and looking at the matter simply as a question of evidence, it is hardly possible to conceive any process for sifting human testimony more complete, more ingenious, or more rigorous than the one scrupulously adhered to by the Congregation of Rites in this respect. A fact only requires the appearance of being supernatural to awaken against it every suspicion; every method of surprise and detection is at once in array against it; it is allowed no mercy, no advantage of a doubt, and anything rather than benefit of clergy.’

For those not familiar with theological words it may be useful to give* the following requisites for constituting a genuine miracle: (1) The act must be one which is above nature, that is, beyond the range of the entire circle of the natural order of this universe. (2) It

* *Ferraria, sub art. Miraculum.*

must be evidently from God, and not the effect of art or of diabolic power. (3) It must not be produced by the force of words, as in Transubstantiation, which is not therefore a miracle, but it must have a connection with the merit of the human agent. (4) It must be wrought in confirmation of the Faith, or in testimony of a person's sanctity. (5) It must be not only produced by God, but also it must be outside the ordinary mode of causation; and therefore the creation of a soul, although by God, is not a miracle.

CHAPTER IX.

BEATIFICATION.

WHEN any person has been declared by the Sovereign Pontiff to be 'beatified,' he is entitled by that act to be called in the Universal Church *beatus* or *blessed*.

Beatification, strictly speaking, to quote the definition of Ferraris,* 'is the lawful authorisation given by the Roman Pontiff to some particular kingdom, province, religious community or place, in order that any person, as one who is reigning with Christ in heaven, may receive a certain public worship—for instance, by the recitation of the Divine Office, the celebration of Mass, and the exposition of his relics—and thus be venerated and invoked according to the terms of the pontifical concession.'

Thus in the Decree of the Beatification of Margaret Mary Alacoque, her body and relics are allowed to be venerated, but not to be carried in solemn procession; and permission is given for the Office and Mass of the

* Art. *Venerat. Sanctorum.*

Common of Virgins, with proper and approved prayers, to be said in her honour; but there is the following limitation: ‘We only allow the celebration of the Mass and recitation of the Office on the 17th October, in the diocese of Autun, and in all the churches throughout the world belonging to those houses in which the religious Order of the Nuns of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is found instituted.’

The faithful throughout the Church are allowed, therefore, to believe that all those who have been beatified are enjoying the Beatific Vision, and consequently to ask for their impetration before the throne of God; although the permission to honour them with the especial modes of religious homage above mentioned is restricted to certain persons and places.

When the Supreme Pontiff decides upon a Beatification after a formal examination of the person’s virtues and miracles, judicially conducted, the Beatification itself is called *formal*, and partakes more of the character of a judgment than a permission, although the technical language used in the decree is always that of concession, such as ‘we permit,’ ‘we indulge,’ ‘we grant.’

When, however, the Supreme Pontiff accepts

the ancient repute of a person's sanctity as justly deserved, and expressly ratifies the previous decision to that effect of a Judge Ordinary, or Delegate, by which a certain *cultus* was sanctioned, the Beatification is in such a case called *equipollent*. It is not 'formal,' because the question has not been conducted throughout by Pontifical authority in a strictly formal and judicial way; but since the result, so far as the recognised position of the beatified person in regard to the Church is concerned, is practically the same, this second mode of Beatification is called *equipollent*. In distinguishing precisely between the two kinds, the latter, compared with the former, may be said to partake more of the character of a concession than of a judgment; it is also capable of revocation, this right being usually reserved to the Congregation by a distinct clause.

We need scarcely remark that the Beatification of Margaret Mary Alacoque belongs to the formal class. Beatification, although more or less judicial in its authoritative character, is not absolutely final; for in the process of fulfilling all the requisites necessary for entitling a person to the name of Saint in its most complete and technical sense, there is one stage further—that of Canonisation, by which

the Beatified is solemnly and definitively enrolled in the *canon* or catalogue of the Saints reigning with Christ. In Beatification, as we have seen, certain special acts of worship are permitted, but also generally restricted to portions of the Universal Church; but in Canonisation there is an explicit, ultimate, and universally obligatory sentence, by which the entire body of the faithful is not allowed only, but is *bound* to believe that the person canonised is in heaven, and deserves to receive the public veneration and religious honours due to the Saints in the whole Church Militant upon earth. In Canonisation, the declaratory words 'we define,' 'we decree,' 'we command,' mark the difference between it and Beatification; the former act is also celebrated with more august pomp than the latter.

Hence Beatification is an inchoate, preparatory, and implicit sentence; or, as some theologians have termed it, a '*particular canonisation*'; whilst that expressly definitive and pronunciative form by which all Catholics are certified that a person reigns in celestial glory is Canonisation.

As the only additional examination required for Canonisation is that of miracles wrought through the intercession of the Servant of God between the Beatification and

Canonisation, it is held by many weighty authorities that the distinction between Beatification and Canonisation is accidental, as it is called in philosophical language, and not essential.

CHAPTER X.

DECREE OF THE BEATIFICATION OF MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.

THE following is a translation of the Decree by which the Servant of God was raised from the rank of Venerable to that of Blessed:

PIUS IX. POPE.

For the perpetual memory of the thing.

Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, Who, led by His exceeding charity, having taken upon Himself the weakness of our mortal nature, offered Himself unspotted unto God upon the altar of the Cross, in order to free us from the most hateful slavery of sin, desired nothing so much as to enkindle, by every means, in the souls of men, that charity with which His Heart was consumed, as we know from the Gospel He declared to His disciples, ‘I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?’

In order the more to enkindle this fire of charity, He willed that the adoration and worship of His most Sacred Heart should be

established and propagated in the Church. For who, indeed, is there so hard-hearted and unfeeling as not to be moved to make a return of love to that amiable Heart Which was pierced and wounded with the lance, in order that our souls might find therein a kind of hiding-place as it were, and secure retreat, to which we might betake ourselves in safety from the attacks and snares of our enemies? Who is not invited to treat with every mark of love and honour that most Sacred Heart, from the Wound of Which flowed forth water and blood, the very fountain of our life and salvation?

In order to establish and spread far and wide amongst mankind this devotion so salutary, and also so justly due from us, our Saviour vouchsafed to choose His servant, the Venerable Margaret Mary de Alacoque, a Religious of the Order of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who by the innocence of her life and the constant practice of every virtue proved herself worthy, with the aid of divine grace, of so exalted a mission and office.

Born of a good family in the town of Lauthe-court, in the diocese of Autun, in France, she manifested from her very infancy a docility, regularity, and gravity beyond her years, so as to give her parents, by unmistakable

tokens, a presage of what she would be in after life. When still quite a child, she showed a distaste for all the little gratifications which are so commonly attractive to children, and repaired to the more retired rooms of the house, where she might with her whole soul worship and adore God. As she grew older, she shunned the company of others, and delighted in nothing so much as in constantly visiting churches, and there prolonging her prayers for several hours. She consecrated her virginity to God from her tender years, and began to afflict her body with fasts, disciplines, and other austerities, that she might thus hedge in, as it were, with thorns, and guard, the flower of her virginity.

She presented also a striking example of meekness and humility. For, when her father was dead, and her mother worn out by age and severe sickness, she was treated with such harshness and severity by those who had care of the house, as often to want even what was necessary for food and clothing. Yet she bore meekly this cruelty and injustice for several years, setting before her eyes the example of the sufferings of Christ.

When she was nine years of age she approached the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time, and drew from this hea-

venly banquet such an ardent charity that the divine fire shone forth from her countenance and eyes.

Inflamed with a like charity towards her neighbour, she deeply grieved at the sad state of so many children, who were almost abandoned by their parents, and were growing up in vice and ignorance of what regarded their eternal salvation; she accordingly instructed them with much patience in the mysteries of faith, trained them to virtue, and was even wont to deprive herself of a considerable portion of her daily sustenance to feed them.

Having chosen for herself a Heavenly Spouse, she steadfastly refused her mother's offer of the hand of a person of wealth and distinction; and the better to insure her fidelity, which she had pledged to her Heavenly Spouse, she thought of entering an Order of cloistered Nuns. After having weighed the matter long and seriously with herself, and consulted the Divine Will with earnest prayer, she was admitted, in the twenty-third year of her age, among the Sisters of the Order of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the town of Paray-le-Monial, in the diocese of Autun.

Having shown herself in her noviceship such as her excellent disposition for virtue and the innocence of her past life had be-

tokened, she deserved to be admitted to pronounce her solemn vows. After pronouncing them, she appeared now to press forward with redoubled speed towards the perfection of religious life, so bright a pattern of all virtues did she exhibit to her Sisters in religion. There shone forth in her a wonderful humility, an extraordinary readiness in obeying, and patience in enduring troubles of every kind, a most exact observance of even the least rules, and a constant severity in afflicting her body; moreover, whilst she devoted herself day and night to continuous prayer, being often rapt in ecstasy, the gifts of divine grace were most plenteously showered upon her. In meditating on the sufferings of Christ our Lord, she was penetrated with sentiments of such deep compassion, and inflamed with so ardent a love, that she commonly appeared as if languishing in a swoon, and scarcely alive.

In course of time, when by her distinguished virtue she had gained the admiration of all her Sisters, she was placed over the young persons who were engaged in their noviceship, that she might train and form them to religious life; and for this office no one could have been found better suited than the Venerable Margaret Mary, since by her own example she animated and encouraged the

young virgins intrusted to her care and guidance to enter upon and run forwards in the way of perfection.

It was now as she was praying with more than usual fervour before the august Sacrament of the Eucharist, that Christ our Lord intimated to her that it would be most pleasing to Him if the worship of His most Sacred Heart, burning with love for mankind, were established, and that He wished the charge of this to be consigned to her. The humility of the Venerable Servant of God was greatly alarmed, as she deemed herself unworthy of such an office; nevertheless, that she might comply with the will of Heaven and satisfy her desire of enkindling divine love in the hearts of men, she earnestly exerted herself both amongst the Religious of her own convent, and also, as far as she could, amongst all persons in general, to induce them to show every mark of honour, worship, and reverence towards that seat of divine charity, the most Sacred Heart.

Many and severe were the troubles which the Venerable Servant of God had, on this account, to endure, and very many difficulties to surmount; she never, however, lost courage; and, relying on the hope of the assistance of Heaven, she applied herself with

such labour and perseverance to promote this devotion, that by the favour of divine grace it has increased and spread far and wide throughout the Church, with great fruit to souls.

At length, desiring to be dissolved, that she might take flight to the heavenly nuptials of the Lamb, for which she so earnestly sighed, and wasted, not so much by disease as by the fire of charity, she departed this life on the 17th of October in the year 1690.

The opinion which had prevailed of the Venerable Margaret Mary's sanctity became more general after her death, especially when confirmed by repeated miracles which were reported to have been wrought through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God. In consequence, in the year 1715, the Bishop of Autun lost no time in procuring documents relating to her life and virtues, to be drawn up in the usual form. But the serious political disturbances which shook nearly the whole of Europe at the close of the eighteenth century prevented the cause from being carried before the Holy See. As soon, however, as the furious civil tempest was calmed, petition for the decision of the Apostolic See was made, and an inquiry instituted into the virtues by which the Venerable

Margaret Mary had been distinguished, in the assembly of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church presiding over the Congregation of Rites; after all the circumstances had been long and carefully weighed, We at length declared by a Decree, published on the 23d of August in the year 1846, that they had reached an heroic degree.

Afterwards in the assembly of Cardinals a discussion was proposed concerning the miracles by which the sanctity of the Venerable Margaret was said to have been confirmed by Heaven; and when, after a rigorous examination, they had been approved of both by the Consultors and the Cardinals, We, having first implored the aid of divine light, pronounced an affirmative sentence regarding the truth of the same miracles, on the 24th day of April of the present year, 1864.

It only remained that the same Cardinals should be asked whether it were safe to proceed to the solemn Beatification of the Venerable Margaret; and being assembled in Our presence on the 14th of June of the present year, they answered with one voice that it was safe to proceed.

We, accordingly, having implored the divine assistance, as was fitting in a matter of such importance, decreed, on the 24th of

June in the same year, that, since it seemed good to Us, the honours of the Blessed, with all the usual privileges, might safely be paid to the Venerable Servant of God until such time as her Canonisation should be solemnised.

We, therefore, moved by the prayers of nearly all the Bishops of France, as also by those of the Religious of the Order of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the counsel and assent of Our venerable brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church presiding over the Congregation of Rites, grant permission by Our apostolic authority that the same Venerable Servant of God, Margaret Mary de Alacoque, may be styled in future by the name of Blessed, and that her body and relics may be presented to the veneration of the faithful, but not carried in solemn processions; moreover, by the same Our authority, we grant that the Office and Mass of the Common of Virgins, with proper prayers approved by Us, according to the rubrics of the Roman Missal and Breviary, may be said in her honour. But we only allow the celebration of Mass and recitation of Office on the 17th of October, in the diocese of Autun, and in all the churches throughout the world belonging to those

houses in which the Religious Order of Nuns of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is found instituted. The aforesaid permission extends to all the faithful, secular and regular, who are bound to the recitation of the Canonical Hours, and, as regards Masses, to all priests that resort to churches in which the Feast is celebrated. In fine, We grant that within the first year after the date of these present letters, the solemnity of the Beatification of the Venerable Servant of God, Margaret Mary de Alacoque, may be celebrated in the dioceses and churches above mentioned with Office and Masses with the rank of a greater double; and We order this celebration to take place on a day to be appointed by the Ordinaries, after the same solemnity has been celebrated in the Vatican Basilica, any Apostolical Constitutions and Ordinations whatsoever, and any other documents to the contrary, notwithstanding.

We will, moreover, that the same regard be paid to the printed copies also of these Letters, provided they be signed by the hand of the Secretary of the aforesaid Congregation of Sacred Rites, and confirmed by the seal of the Prefect, as would be paid to the manifestation of Our will expressed by these present Letters.

Given at Castel Gandolpho, under the Seal
of the Fisherman, on the 29th day of the
month of August in the year 1864, the nine-
teenth year of Our Pontificate.

N. CARD. PARACCIANI CLARELLI.

THE END.

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